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prosecco

A wine and food haven lies north of the Venetian plain by Roger Morris

bubbly italians

WE ARE SUSPENDED A FEW HUNDRED FEET ABOVE THE STEEP HILLSIDES OF CARTIZZE, the site that is the holiest of the holy in the sparkling world of Prosecco. To our right is the small town of Valdobbiadene, and to our left, across a string of low-lying peaks, is its sister city of Conegliano, which, together, define Italy's most famous sparkling wine region. Ahead of us, a few dozen miles due south, is Venice and the sea.

Below us, an elegant picnic awaits in a hilltop clearing among the vine rows as soon as we alight from our morning helicopter tour, which is being led by Matteo Bisol, the young scion of the wine family that owns many of the hill's vines.

Once back on the ground, the air is fresh, but the sun is hot, so the picnic umbrellas and the glass of ripe, rich, sparkling 2007 Bisol Valdobbiadene Vigneti del Fol are very welcoming. So are the passed delicacies being prepared on site by Bartolini Gigetto, chef of the famous Da Gigetto restaurant in nearby Miane.

"Cartizze is the first very high hill you encounter coming across the plain from Venice," says Gianluca Bisol, Matteo's father and president of the family firm that has been making wine here since 1542. Venice, in its glory as a seafaring world power, once owned this region that lies just beneath the foothills to the Alps.



Prosecco is the name of both the wine and the primary grape from which it is made, and Conegliano-Valdobbiadene is its major appellation or DOC. Within the region, Gianluca explains, Cartizzi's 262 acres of vineyards constitute the appellation's cru, or best location. The minerally, well-drained

soils and the gentle microclimate produce wines of great structure and elegance.

Unlike Champagne, Prosecco is made in tanks, not bottles, which local producers say is the best way to capture the delicacy of the aromatic Prosecco grape. Champagne and Prosecco are not any more capable of being compared, they argue, than two dry red wines from different grapes and different regions. In all, there are about 150 producers, many of whom sell to the U.S. market.

Franco Adami, currently head of the wine consortium, is typical of the small grower-producers and makes some of the best Prosecco in the region. With 10 hectares, or about 32 acres of vines, "I don't need a picking crew," he says. "We can harvest with family and friends." Still, he is very attentive to quality. "We don't do too soft a pressing at harvest," he says, running his fingers back through his dark, curly hair. "We want some skin pressing for fragrance, minerality, and food for the fermentation." As we walk through the winery, a large pop bears testimony to the fact that Adami, like many producers, makes a few cuvees of bottle-fermented wine, although they can't be called Prosecco.

Purchase from a delicious array of Prosecco from San Francisco's Prosecco expert, Cari Smith at her charming Russian Hill wine boutique Biondivino. www.biondivino.com



From Left to right: Franco Adami heads the consortium of small growers; Valdo Cuvée de Boj is known in some circles as the World's Best Prosecco; City Center in Valdobbiadene—Prosecco capital of Italy.

